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pax christi international

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International Catholic Peace Movement

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Intervention of Pax Christi International on the
situation in East Timor

(agenda, item 9)

Mr. Chairman,

First of all, I would like to thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to produce some considerations concerning the plight of East Timor. As you know, East Timor lies some 400 miles off the North-West coast of Australia. Before World War II, the Western half of the island was administrated by the Netherlands, and the Eastern half by Portugal. When Indonesia achieved its independence from the Netherlands, in 1949, the Western half became part of Indonesia, while Portugal continued to administer the Eastern half - EAST TIMOR - until 1974, when it decided to decolonize East-Timor by permitting a formation of the local and political parties - UDT, FRETILIN, APODETI, KOTA and TRABALHISTA - as a first step towards self-determination by the East Timorese people.

In August 1975, the Portuguese authorities evacuated East-Timor during civil disorders fomented in part by the Indonesians. In November 1975 FRETILIN proclaimed the Democratic Republic of East-Timor independent and on December 7th, 1975, Indonesia invaded and annexed the territory. More than 100'000 East Timorese have died from war, famine and disease.

Since the Indonesian invasion of East-Timor, in 1975, the United Nations consistent with its principles and Charter, have almost reaffirmed the right of East Timorese people to self-determination. In fact, according to the principles of United Nations Charter and in accordance with the international Covenants on Civil and Political Rights: "all peoples have the right of self-determination". The Timorese are people. Therefore they have the right of self-determination.

Although the principles are clear enough and favouring the cause of East-Timor, however, some nations have been reluctant to recognize it in practical terms. Some said they have commercial links, a big financial investment in Indonesia, and so they are afraid of losing such a big market as Indonesia. So, generally, they have been always abstaining in their votations in the General Assembly and practically they have denied the right of self-determination to East-Timor. To some extent, I understand their position, when they strive to seek good relations and commercial links with Indonesia. But, what I can't understand is that they willingly sacrifice the right of self-determi-

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...Nation of East-Timor in exchange of money, commerce and material commodities. I do not approve such a criterion. I think in a conflict raised between Human Rights and commerce, we have to give priority to Human Rights, which are fundamental to human being.

...On the other hand I think that there is no contradiction between commercial link and Human Rights. So, we can promote commercial links with Indonesia, but at the same time we have to recognize the right of East-Timorese people to self-determination and independence.

I know that it was suggested East-Timor should be regarded as a natural part of Indonesia, because of historical, ethnic, cultural and geographical ties between the two countries. In my opinion, this argument does not stand up to close scrutiny. In fact, the Timorese people and Indonesians are essentially distinct people. The Timorese people are Melanesians, while the Indonesians are Javanese. On the other side, if geographical contiguity and tenuous historical and other links legitimate grounds for this incorporation, Indonesia could also justifiably annex the Eastern states of Malaysia and Papua-New-Guinea, which share these traits in common with Indonesia. But, there is another objection: that Indonesians have spent a lot of money in East-Timor since 1975 until now. I really accept the fact but I have another interpretation of aid, quite different.

Firstly I would like to put beforehand this question. Who forced Indonesians to spend such money in East-Timor? Secondly, it should not be forgotten that such expenditures is intended to consolidate integration by furthering the Indonesianization of East-Timor, which is the very point at issue. Thirdly, with these expenditures the Indonesians are trying to deflect your attention from other facets, such as military activities, manifold restrictions on basic liberties, human right abuses and so on.

We know that some delegations want last year to visit East-Timor, but unfortunately they were not able to ask the people what they want. I am East-Timorese myself and I know very well what are the feelings in their hearts. So, I can tell you what they want. What they want is the opportunity to decide for themselves their own political future. In my view point, it seems that only a genuine and completely free act of self-determination will bring peace to East-Timor and the war will go on and on, for as long as natural justice and freedom are denied to the East-Timorese people.

After 8 years of war, the resistance of the people is going on against the Indonesian aggression. This seems to be a clear indication that the East-Timorese people wants not to be integrated by force into the Republic of Indonesia, but rather to be independent and rule their own political destiny. I myself would have no objections, if the East-Timorese people, free of all kind of pressures, from inside or outside, choosed integration with Indonesia. But on the contrary, if the East-Timorese people want to be independent at all costs, I will have no doubt at all to follow it, because it will be the right way based on their peoples' free will, on the democracy.

Mgr Martinho da Costa Lopes

(Apostolic Administrator of Dili, resignator 1983)

Geneva, February 21/1984